

Love One Another

If You Love Me...

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15, ESV). What commandments? All of them? Everything he ever said? Actually, Jesus had a specific commandment in mind. Just a few sentences prior, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (Jn 13:34). John indicates this further in his Gospel as well as his letters:

Jn 15:12 - This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Jn 15:17 - These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

1 Jn 3:11 - For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

1 Jn 3:23 - And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

1 Jn 4:21 - And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 Jn 5:2 - By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

So when we read “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” what we should hear is “If you love me, you will love one another, as I have commanded you.”

A Distinct Love

What makes us distinct as Christians? What sets us apart as a body of believers? What marks us as different from others? Jesus commands us to do the very thing that identifies us, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35 ESV). It is by our love for each other that all people will know that we are followers of Christ. There are other ways which we might think to identify ourselves – labels, doctrinal positions, pedigree – but our Master explicitly mentioned only one: Our love for each other. This makes sense as it is the greatest command (Mt 22:37-40). The trait by which we ought to be identified is our primary directive – to love each other. It should set us apart. When we have such a love, it will be noticed.

The Love of God and the Love of Brother

Consider these weighty and explicit words, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 Jn 4:7-8, ESV). We must love one another to share in God’s nature of love. The love of God and love for God is inextricably connected to the love for brother. Consider the following:

1 John 2:10 - Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

1 John 3:10 - By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:14 - We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

1 John 3:16-17 - By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

1 John 4:11-12 - Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

John summarizes this thought well towards the end of his letter, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 Jn 4:20-21).

How Important Is Love, Really?

How important is love? Jesus said that love was the greatest command and that His disciples would be known by their love, but how important is it, really? The apostle Paul spelled it out for us: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:1-3, ESV). I can’t get over how profound this passage is. Even if you miraculously spoke in exotic languages for sharing the gospel, if you don’t have love, your message is just annoying noise. Even if the Spirit worked in you miraculous foresight, supernatural knowledge, and mountain-moving faith, if you have not love, you are nothing. If you were to give away every possession you had in the name of Jesus but have not love, you gain nothing. If you were burned at the stake for your faith in Jesus Christ, if you have not love, you gain nothing. Love is tied so closely to our identity as disciples of Jesus that, without it, we aren’t His disciples at all. Without love we would gain nothing and would be nothing. But, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers” (1 Jn 3:14a).